COUNT CAGLIOSTRO: AN EXCURSION INTO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY CHARLATANISM*

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The word *charlatan* is taken direct from the French which in turn derives it from the Italian *ciarlatano,* substantive of the verb *ciarla,* meaning *to prattle.* A charlatan therefore is, in the original meaning, a prattler, while later is added the idea of one who boasts extravagantly; and finally we have this definition—"one who makes unwarranted or extravagant pretentions, as to the possession of knowledge or skill."** In this sense it has come to carry rather sinister or at least opprobrious implications to those of us who entertain pretentions to honesty. That such sinister meaning should always attend our employment of the term does not seem altogether fair, and in the sketchy portrayal of one of the world's great charlatans which I shall attempt this evening, I would ask you to withhold your more severe judgment, at any rate till the end.

In presenting this study alongside Doctor van Beuren's wholly delightful picture of Rabelais, I have no intention of suggesting that the two men, Rabelais and Cagliostro, are on anything like the same moral or intellectual level or that in any but an antithetic manner the one should suggest the other. Comparisons between them show some similarities, but greater contrasts. Cagliostro in his own field was as great a man as was Rabelais in his. Both possessed a rowdy humor. Both had a keen insight into the foibles of humanity and knew well how to play upon them. They contrast sharply, however, in their background, education and purpose in life. Rabelais, as Doctor van Beuren has pointed out, was of gentle birth, was trained by study of the humanities, knew the modern

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** Standard Dictionary.

languages as well as the classics. He studied theology, law, and medicine in the best universities of the day, and above all was a man of letters whose writings have influenced and delighted mankind from his day to our own. Cagliostro was of low birth, educated in the gutter and the dark and murky university of the underworld life of his time. Charlatan to the core, he was a mere pretender at linguistics; wrote nothing, because he could not write; left to posterity a reputation and record solely of trickery and deceit. The one satirized the weaknesses of humanity to its instruction and betterment; the other capitalized those weaknesses for his own selfish ends.

With other ideals in life, and with an education comparable to that which Rabelais enjoyed, Cagliostro might have rivalled Paracelsus. He was equally quick-witted and keen, equally noisy in discussion, fully as bombastic and overbearing. He might in some degree be likened to Falstaff. The gross makeup and gross appetites of the two were much alike, but comparison turns in favor of Sir John, for his roguery was of the childlike type, one might almost call it honest. Certainly it was not vicious or harmful. He cheated and robbed for the fun of the thing, and with a bawdy glee that makes him lovable, a quality claimed for Cagliostro by none of his biographers except his apologist, Trowbridge. One can only regret that our Count did not have some training in letters and leave us an authentic memoir or at the least some contemporary to play Boswell to his Johnson. Such a document might easily have gone down as one of the great biographies of all time. Certainly the raw material was there.

So much by way of preface.

Gilbert: "Monsieur, I am anxious to be a physician."

Rousseau: "A noble profession in which you may choose between real science, ever modest and self effacing, and quackery, ever noisy and empty. If you would become a physician, young man, study: if a quack, nothing but impudence and effrontery are necessary."

Memoirs of a Physician—Dumas.

As the healing art is the offspring of religion and intellectual curiosity, so is charlatanism the illegitimate child of religion and greed. Both medicine and quackery are so ancient and full grown when we first know them that no one may say which is the elder. Records of the one are as ancient as accounts of the other and time out of mind the bastard brother has fattened and waxed rich on the energy of the honest scientist whose discoveries he has emasculated and corrupted to his own gross misuse.

Yet there is always some offset and the record of quackery is not wholly black, or shall we say that medicine has from time to time had its eyes opened through the medium of charlatanism and thus seen great lights. Did not Hahnemann, more than any other, give impetus to a really scientific study of the materia medica and a more rational therapeusis? Did not Mother Eddy direct attention to our flagging interest in, and almost criminal negligence of, the neuropsychiatric field? What of osteopathy as a stimulus to modern orthopedics and physiotherapy? Has not Freud done a distinct service in prodding some, and all too few as yet, of our psychologists into seeking to place themselves on a firm basis of scientific knowledge?

The harm of quackery is infinite, but withal it carries grim humor and caustic mirth in its train. Tongue in cheek, it fleeces its victims and appeals for security in the very sense of ridicule which is heaped on its dupes—some innocent, others designing as itself.

The man around whom this particular discussion is developed may be regarded as pure quack, a scion of rascaldom, the Great Liar in "a World of the merest incoherent Lies and Delirium," as Carlisle in his own atrabilious way regards him. Or there is the alternative picture which Dumas portrays and which Trowbridge, of modern writers, seems to feel is more accurate, namely, that of a man who befriended the poor and who schemed with high purpose the overthrow of tyranny but who did not scorn to employ

what to modern eyes appear low and ignoble means, even rank deceit, if thereby he gain high ends. No doubt there is need for interpretation.

A glance at the times will perhaps illuminate his background and his stock in trade. His milieu was that of the French Revolution. Born in 1743, he died in 1795 at the age of fifty-two. His period of greatest activity or influence or notoriety, as you will, was the fifteen years from 1770 to 1785. The Seven Years' War between Frederick the Great and the allied nations had come to an end in 1763. The French and Indian Wars had stripped France of her American Colonies and the campaign in India had ended her colonial state in the Far East. The American struggle for freedom followed. Poland was being partitioned by Frederick and Maria Theresa of Austria. England, under the George II and III, was warily eyeing the confused political situation in Europe, ready to pounce if it might be to her advantage, apprehensive always lest the seething popular discontent of the continent should wash up on her own shores and infect her body politic. Underneath all, revolution was brewing in France. Louis XV, the "Well Beloved", with his series of mistresses from Pompadour to the du Barry, his unsuccessful colonial wars and his expensive victories on the continent, had impoverished, overtaxed, and alienated his subjects. Poverty and discontent filled France. Hunger stalked naked through its streets and lanes. Injustice and wrong doing were the order of the day. Mere existence was problematic. One existed as one could. The middle class was being slowly crushed out of existence between the despairing and desperate lower orders and the selfishness and self-deceiving extravagance of the aristocracy, who, adopting the motto, "eat, drink, and be merry", sought to hide from their fears of tomorrow in the license of today. Carlisle well terms it "a World of the merest incoherent Lies and Delirium". Small wonder that charlatanism was rife. Everyone had a cure to offer. Anyone's guess was as good as another's. The church was in exile. Ancient verities

had gone by the board. The magic words "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", were rapidly replacing the old religion and Voltaire, with his religious and intellectual quackery was leading the dance. It was a veritable Walpurgisnacht. Naturally in such a maelstrom of political, economic, and intellectual confusion mountebanks and charlatans, soothsayers and wonderworkers became the order of the day. Sanity and rational thought were at low ebb. Men like the Comte de Saint Germain, Mesmer, Psalmanazar, and Casanova flourished. The wonder working tomb of the Abbe Francois de Paris became a Mecca for pilgrimage. Ghosts stalked through the night and portents filled the air.

Into these troublous times in 1743 there was born to one Pietro Balsamo, a shopkeeper of Palermo, a son destined to give color to a mean and squalid era, to lend some humor to tragedy, to be, as LeNotre describes him, "a precious person, whose mysterious figure dominated the last hours of the French monarchy." Giuseppe Balsamo was soon left fatherless, and the boy, endowed with insatiable greed for food and very little in his mother's lean pantry to satisfy it, developed to the full his propensity to lie, cheat, and steal. He soon became the terror of all the housewives. An uncle, stepping in to save the family name, placed him in school. Escapades and floggings followed with such frequency that there was probably little time for polite learning. Whether voluntarily or no, history does not say, Giuseppe retired from school after no long trial of its benefits and then, penitently it may be, expressed a desire for a monastic career. Through the offices of the same uncle he entered as a novice at the age of 13 the Convent of the Benfratelli at Cartegirone. Here he was put to work in the dispensary and became famulus to the convent apothecary. *Sic volvere Parcas.* To his mind, already stocked with the wiles and trickeries of the street gamins and gutter urchins of Palermo, was now added in the convent laboratory the tincture of pseudo-science which was to loom large in his future career. Such knowledge of drugs and the care of minor wounds and ailments as could be acquired in this

place, he no doubt absorbed in his year or two of apprenticeship; but more, we may be sure, of the seeds of alchemy, thaumaturgy, and the crookeder precepts of the so-called sciences of the day were implanted in the fertile soil of his mentality. Yet work, as ever, palled on him, and Giuseppe grew particularly restless under the strain of one of his duties, which was to read aloud from the lives of the martyrs while the brethren were having their evening meal. A rather torrid humor came to his aid here, for one night as he read, he substituted for the names of the saints, the names of some of the brethren present coupled with those of Palermo's well known women of loose morals. This broke up the supper, brought him a flogging, and resulted is his fleeing the Convent that night and returning to his mother's fireside, convinced that the ecclesiastical life held no further attractions for him.

The quaint habit called eating was still his main hobby, but eating meant work, and in his nature these two were antithetic. To lie and steal were easier but uncomfortably, every now and then one was caught. So he took up painting, which was dull and of little profit and boredom drove him to search for other and more congenial pursuits. He promoted an affair between his cousin and her lover, appropriating to himself the latter's gifts. He forged tickets to the theatres and for the benefit of a certain religious house, falsified a will. Even in this early day he adopted the cause of the poor and defended them against the minions of the law, his own brazen impudence or the intercession of relatives gaining his acquittal when he was haled into court.

The last act of Balsamo's boyhood follows. One Marano, a goldsmith of Palermo, was much given to superstition and magic, and Giuseppe began by playing upon his fears and credulity, then spoke guardedly of buried treasure and how to obtain it by virtue of his own powers of divination. The ground prepared, he agreed for 60 ounces of gold to find a hidden treasure for the eager dupe. On a dark night he led Marano to a lonely spot in the woods and after vari-

ous incantations, set the latter to digging, the 60 ounces of gold having been deposited in a safe place nearby. While Marano sweated and dug, the youth exorcised the evil spirits of the place and did all he could to rouse the fears and apprehensions of his victim and to make his sweat a truly cold one. Suddenly some accomplices appeared in the guise of demons and other fearsome shapes, set upon the poor goldsmith and administered a terrific beating. In the ensuing confusion the 60 ounces of gold, the only treasure in the vicinity, of course disappeared. Conspirators and victim fled. Following his night of terror some sense was restored to Marano and soon after he made loud complaint. Giuseppe found it expedient to decamp from Palermo with all possible expedition.

Here ends all that is authentic of the boyhood career of the young Balsamo. At various times in later life he spoke of Malta, Egypt, Arabia; of companionship with the sage Althotas from whom he claimed to have learned all the mysteries of alchemy; and of adoption by the Sherif of Mecca; but whithersoever his travels in the next few years, we may feel sure that his education in trickery and deceit went on apace, however circumscribed or wide these perigrinations may have been. Like Pistol the world was his oyster.

After a lapse of several years Giuseppe turned up in Rome where he shortly married Lorenza Feliciani, the beautiful daughter of a girdle maker. Angering his father-in-law by his unwillingness to settle down to an honest but humdrum life of trade, he left with his wife and soon appeared on the northbound road in the regalia of a Prussian colonel. Meagre accounts of their vicissitudes in the years that follow are obtained from police records in Spain, Portugal, Belgium, southern France, and northern Italy. Their means of livelihood would seem from these records to have been the selling of love potions and beautifiers, telling of fortunes, and any other form of cheating that appeared to fill the needs of the moment. Different aliases were assumed as fortune varied, and in a prosperous period

Balsamo even had the effrontery to return to his native Palermo as the Marchese Pellegrini, probably with the idea of splurging before his boyhood acquaintances. But to his ingenuous disgust the past, incontinent, rose up to plague him. Marano, who still mourned his 60 ounces of gold, was not to be brazened out by titles, and the little matter of the forged will had meantime been uncovered. This resulted in landing Balsamo behind the bars. But he or Lorenza had made an influential friend in the person of the son of the reigning prince or duke, and this personage so intimidated the authorities that Giuseppe was let go. Once free, he and his precious spouse sought healthier climes.

Another period of historical obscurity follows, but in 1772 he turned up in London and took up house painting. This we assume to have been interior decorating. On the side he dealt in love potions, restorers of lost vitality (cantharides was well known to the initiate of those days), charms, beautifiers, and whatever else promised easy return for least labor.

He soon quarreled with others of shady reputation. As London was the Mecca for quackery it is probable that the sturdy English artisans of this particular guild had little use for a foreign interloper and, through recourse to the law, persuaded the Balsamos to leave. This they did, disappearing again in the dark mazes of the continent. No record exists of what followed till they reappeared in London in 1776 as the Count Cagliostro and the Countess Seraphina. On this visit the pair were apparently wealthy. At any rate their stock-in-trade had expanded, for now spirit rapping, hypnotism, legerdemain and occultism of all sorts, were added to their bag of tricks. Prophecy even was attempted but after three accurate predictions of winning lottery numbers, Cagliostro declined further effort in this field, either because his secret source of information failed him, or because he regarded the risk as too great. Yet it had helped to establish his reputation. He worked medical cures also but for the poor only and without charge.

This was a curious phase of the man's modus operandi which later became more conspicuous.

Again, as a few years earlier, his fellow craftsmen in the occult and predatory sciences could not abide his success, and, through the offices of members of the legal profession of their own moral ilk, haled him before the tribunal of the Old Bailey. While it appears that no charges were sustained, they made things so uncomfortable, and the Fleet Street prison appeared so real that Cagliostro and the Countess Seraphina again, after a couple of years residence, shook the dust of London from their feet and sought other fields of harvest on the Continent.

During this second stay in London, however, an event highly important in the life of Cagliostro, took place. He and Lorenza joined the Freemasons. Now whether this step was taken primarily because the secrecy, mystery, blazonry and titles of Masonry appealed to him as a fertile field for exploitation, or because he had already secured the Cofton manuscript and the idea of Egyptian Masonry had begun to maturate, is not of importance. The fact is that it was during this second stay in London that he joined the brotherhood and proceeded shortly after to organize the Egyptian Rite of Masonry. Upon the death of a certain George Cofton, Cagliostro obtained his manuscript which dealt fully with the subject of Egyptian masonry. No one else knew of this so that Cagliostro had a perfectly free territory in which to erect a "system" of his own. He embodied in it his pet ideas of physical regeneration and transmutation of metals. He himself became at once, and was thereafter to his death, known as the Grand Cophtha of the new order, while Lorenza, or the Countess Seraphina, was its High Priestess. The restoration of lost youth and the power to make gold were notions in those days of high living with a definitely popular appeal, and the order flourished. Lodges were organized wherever he went, and the initiation, dues, and other perquisites became a source of unending and well nigh fabulous wealth.

The Count and Countess can now be followed through Saxony, eastern Germany and Poland, establishing Grand Lodges of the new order wherever they went, living in ease, even luxury, and travelling with a splendid retinue. In 1780 they reached St. Petersburg, where they established free clinics and lodges. Access to Catherine, however, was denied Cagliostro—an object which was apparently the chief reason for this trip. Through the wiles of the fair Seraphina he did succeed in gaining the influence of Potemkin, Catherine's then favorite; but at the moment when audience with the Empress seemed within his grasp, he was attacked by both the Prussian and Spanish ambassadors at the Court on the slight matter of the Prussian colonel's uniform, and certain pecadilloes which appeared to have made some impression on the police blotters of Spain.

The impression created by Cagliostro during this visit to St. Petersburg is set forth by Catherine the Great in a letter to Baron Grimm. Its strictures must be taken with a grain of salt for Catherine was never one to give herself away, and it is certainly a fact that in her literary efforts she wrote two dramas based on the Count's career. "I have read the memoir of Cagliostro which you have sent me and if I had not been already persuaded that he was a French charlatan his memoir would have convinced me. He is a rogue and blackguard and he ought to be hanged. M. Cagliostro arrived here at a very favorable moment for him, at a time when many lodges of Freemasons, infatuated with the principles of Swedenborg, desired with all their power to see spirits. They therefore ran to Cagliostro who said that he was in possession of all the secrets of Doctor Falk, intimate friend of Duke Richelieu, who had once sacrificed to him in the very midst of Vienna a black goat . . . M. Cagliostro then produced his marvelous secrets of healing. He pretended to draw quick-silver from a gouty foot and was caught in the act of pouring a teaspoonful of mercury into the water into which he was going to put the gouty member . . . Later on, racked by debts, he took refuge in the cellar of Monsieur Yelagin . . . where

he drank all the wine, champagne, and English beer that he could get . . . Monsieur Yelagin, annoyed by his brother rat in the cellar and by the thought of all the wine, and beer . . . gave him an old invalide to accompany him as far as Milan. This is the history of Cagliostro in which there is nothing exceptionally marvelous. I have never seen him near or far,—nor have I had any temptation to do so, for I do not love charlatans. I assure you that Rogerson thinks of Cagliostro as much or less than Noah's Ark. Prince Orlov, contrary to his custom, has not made much of Cagliostro. He makes fun of him as of those who from mere curiosity run to see him, and he has contributed but little to change into wine the water of the shameless partisans of this poor devil. But since the more stupid and ignorant the charlatans are, the more impression they create in the great cities, it is to be supposed that Cagliostro will be in his element in Paris."

So on to Courland, then Warsaw, where a trifling slip in the process of changing lead into gold before a distinguished audience led to denunciation by one of the witnesses, consequent discomfort, and pressing need for change of climate. They travelled in style; according to his Inquisition biographer, "with a considerable suite; couriers, lackeys, bodyguards, servants and domestics of all sorts, sumptuously dressed, gave an air of reality to the high birth he vaunted." By now, be it noted, he referred mysteriously to his high birth in Trebizond, where a princess, compromised through a love affair with a prince of the Island of Malta, had revealed him to the world somewhat after the manner of Moses' discovery by Pharaoh's daughter.

In 1783 he arrived at Strasbourg more flourishing than ever. In these intervening years he had come in contact with the Illuminés, an inner order of masonry whose chief concern was the overthrow of the Pope and crowned heads in general, beginning with the French monarch in particular. It seems quite probable that he became an important and well paid agent for this revolutionary organization

and endeavoured through it to strengthen his Egyptian lodges. Arrived in Strasbourg, whither his reputation as a healer and philanthropist had preceded him, he established free clinics and set about visiting the sick poor. He gave money freely where it was needed and refused all fees for his cures. He attached to himself here a licensed and well-trained physician who had run foul of his professional brethren and was for the time being outside the pale of good medical practice. The knowledge and skill of this man undoubtedly added greatly to the success of the clinic and enlarged the quota of cures.

He scorned clients of wealth, and when Cardinal de Rohan, Archbishop of Strasbourg, whose curiosity and cupidity were at once aroused, sent an invitation to Cagliostro to visit him, the latter replied to the messenger with consummate impudence,—"If Monseigneur the Cardinal is ill, let him come to me, I will cure him: if he is well, he has no need of me, I, none of him." Thus did he bait his hook, for the Cardinal seems to have been the fish he was after in this particular pond. In due course he netted and landed him.

Cardinal de Rohan was the most prominent scion of the powerful de Rohan family of Brittany. He was high in the councils of the Church, and in 1778 and 1779 had been ambassador at the court of Vienna. He was very wealthy, but extravagant and always in debt. Alchemy and the occult sciences had long attracted him and he had his own laboratory in his palace at Savergne where he dabbled after the secrets of rejuvenation, the Philosopher's Stone, and whatever other occult matters aroused his interest. He and the alchemist and occultist Cagliostro fitted like glove and hand and it was not long before a meeting was arranged when acquaintance, then friendship were established. Cagliostro took up quarters under the Cardinal's roof. Great lover that he was, the beautiful Seraphina probably played no small part in the enslavement of the prelate. Trowbridge will not admit that she was anything but honest and pure but Carlisle, as do most contemporary observers, takes a rather sinister view of her love affairs

with Potemkin and the Cardinal and regards her as the willing tool in her husband's hands, the lure for his victims. Just what gain Cagliostro secured from his friendship with de Rohan is not clear. Trowbridge says there is no record of his having money from him. That is as may be. It is probable that, as an agent of the Illuminés, Cagliostro gained prestige and influence through the acquaintanceship and was paving the way for furtherance of their plans. He kept up his free clinics, working wonderful cures, and from time to time made trips to Bordeaux, Lyons, and other cities where he established Grand Lodges and otherwise forwarded the interests of Egyptian Masonry. This was his great game and while the Illuminés undoubtedly regarded him as their agent, he unquestionably planned to make them subservient to himself, the Grand Cophtha of the Egyptian Rite. From these two sources at any rate sprang a sufficient fountain of wealth to make him now entirely independent of petty gain, and completely free to promote his reputation through his charitable ministrations to the poor and afflicted.

Le Notre tells us that the Count Cagliostro made his debut in Paris in 1781, and describes the house which he occupied, at the corner of the Rue Saint-Claude and the Boulevard Beaumarchais. It was still standing there in the early years of the present century when Le Notre visited it. From the description this is undoubtedly the house in which Dumas lays so many of the scenes in his *Memoirs of a Physician.* Apparently the Count's arrival in Strasbourg followed his appearance in Paris and he probably spent the next five years in residence both in Strasbourg and Paris.

Le Notre gives this interesting description of the man: "He was a rather awkward man, badly dressed in blue taffetas gallooned all over, and his powdered hair was arranged in long, drooping curls in the most ridiculously curious manner. He wore *chine* stockings with gold clocks, and velvet shoes with buckles gemmed with precious stones. There was an excess of diamonds on his fingers, on his shirt

frills, and on his watch chains; on his head was a charlatan's hat ornamented with white feathers; and eight months out of the year he wore a large blue fox-skin cloak, in addition to a fur hood like a *carapousse.* When children caught sight of him in his three-cornered fox-skin hat, it was a question as to who would get away first.

"His features were regular, his skin rosy, and his teeth superb. I shall not describe his physiognomy, because he had twelve or fifteen at his disposal. Never had such eyes as his been seen before."

Beugnot, who dined with Count Cagliostro at Madame de la Motte's, gives in his Memoirs the following description: "I only looked at him by stealth, and did not yet know what to think of him. His face, his head-dress, the man's whole appearance awed me in spite of myself. I waited to hear him speak. He spoke a most awful gibberish of Italian and French, and made many quotations, which were supposed to have been in Arabic, but which he did not trouble to translate. He alone spoke, and had time to touch on twenty subjects, because he developed them only as far as suited his convenience. He was constantly asking if he were understood, whereupon the company all around bowed to assure him of it. Upon entering on a subject he seemed transported and assumed a lofty attitude as regards both voice and gesture. But suddenly he would descend to the level of ordinary mortals to address most tender compliments and comical pretty speeches to our hostess. This manoeuvre lasted the whole of the meal, and I learnt nothing from the hero except that he had spoken of the heavens, the stars, the great Arcanum, Memphis, Hierophant, transcendental chemistry, giants, and huge animals; of a town which is ten times larger than Paris, in the interior of Africa, where he has correspondents; of our ignorance of all these beautiful things which he has on the tips of his fingers; and that he had interlaced his discourse with comically inspired compliments to Madame de la Motte, whom he called his *biche,* his gazelle, his swan, and his dove—thus borrowing his appelations from what

was most lovable in the animal kingdom. At the close of the dinner he deigned to put several questions to me one after the other, to all of which I replied with a most respectful confession of ignorance. I have since heard from Madame de la Motte that he received the most favorable impression of my person and my knowledge."

This carries us down to the affair of the Diamond Necklace. Though he was probably entirely innocent of any complicity therein, this marked the turning point in this precious rogue's career. Despite the very minor role he played in the drama and though he was practically an innocent victim, the story must be related because, justly or unjustly, it covered him with an opprobrium and unpleasant notoriety from which he never recovered. As a direct result of it he fell into the clutches of the Inquisition and died in a Papal prison.

A few of the *dramatis personae* deserve special notice.

Jeanne de Jacques-Rémy, self styled Comtesse de la Motte de Valois, was the daughter of a drunken poacher, who, though now fallen on evil days, was without doubt a left-handed descendent of Henri II and therefore entitled, the bar sinister being but a minor social impediment in those days, to the Valois name. Left an orphan in early childhood, as a street gamin of seven, she gained by her whining petitions the attention of the Marquise Boulainvilliers, who took Jeanne under her wing, reared her, gave her education and instruction in dressmaking, but turned her off on her runaway marriage to one Nicholas La Motte, a petty officer of dragoons. Madame La Motte-Valois then became a reality and soon her spouse assumed the title of "Count". Thereafter she was the Comtesse de la Motte de Valois. During an effort to reconcile herself with her former patroness she met the Cardinal Louis de Rohan and by dint of her not inconsiderable sex appeal combined with an easy virtue, her complaisant spouse soon gained a captaincy of dragoons and the pair established themselves in Paris. Efforts to gain access to the court were unavailing but in various ways in which gambling and pro-

curing probably played no small part, they maintained a position at least showy.

Enter now Louis de Rohan, Prince of Brittany, Cardinal Bishop of Strasbourg, Grand Almoner of France, Ambassador to the Court of Vienna and holder of a dozen other titles. In 1770, while in residence at Strasbourg, he had officially welcomed to France the sixteen year old Marie Antoinette on her journey to Versailles to marry the Dauphin. De Rohan fell in love with the beautiful Princess and from then on his great and consuming ambition was to be near her at Court and through her influence, attain to the Ministry of State. A few years later (1779) he became ambassador to the Viennese Court but there, alas, bitterly offended Maria Theresa who never forgave him and succeeded in imparting her hatred of the prelate to her daughter, Marie. So at Strasbourg he met his heart's desire, only later on to be baffled and sickened by the futility of its pursuit. Also at Strasbourg he met the arch conspirator, the *fons et origo* of the drama, the precious Comtesse Jeanne; and equally at Strasbourg, fateful bishopric, he fell into the toils of Count Cagliostro. Beautiful in person, but dumb, was the Cardinal—lover of good living, lover of display, lover of women, but disappointed in his great love and unconsoled by an assortment of mistresses; religious enough to be steeped in mysticism, ignorant to the point of being an easy prey for the charlatan and a gullible dupe for the scheming adventuress. His enforced remoteness from, and ignorance of events at Court, made him swallow with avidity the messages sent him by his protegé, Jeanne, who fed him with tales of all she was doing to reinstate him and gain him favor with the Queen. Soon this little liar begins to transmit purported word of mouth messages from the Queen and the Cardinal was thus made hungrily ready to swallow the bait whensoever it should be dangled near enough to his esurient lips.

Meantime two honest jewellers, the one from an Amsterdam ghetto, the other of like complexion from Saxony, had been preparing the property for the drama, namely, the

Diamond Necklace itself. Boehmer and Bassenger had met in the course of their trade in jewels, formed a partnership and been appointed Jewellers to the Court of Louis XV. The King was disposed to deny his then favorite little and under the acquisitive eye of the du Barry, they built a thriving business. Boehmer conceived the idea of a piece of jewelry for the King's mistress which should surpass anything the world had ever seen, sure that His Majesty would not deny her. A well nigh certain and honest penny might thus be turned. The assembling of the stones for the necklace then began and after some three years with an expenditure of 800,000 francs, the task was completed and the necklace ready to be offered for sale at the modest price of 1,600,000 francs. *Eheu fugaces!* that such best laid plans should untimely gang agley. Louis XV, that scarlet old sinner, just when the fruits of their labor hung temptingly before their eyes, was inconsiderate enough to contract smallpox; and in St. Denis, uncomfortably, very uncomfortably for Monsieurs Boehmer and Bassenger, "fell asleep in the Lord", May, 1774. (Abbé Georgel)

Of course the du Barry was through and with her, their market. Louis XVI was for a brief period attracted with the thought of presenting the necklace to the Queen, but Marie herself said France needed ships more than necklaces. The months and years went by and no purchaser appeared. Then a hint was dropped in the eager ear of Boehmer that the Cardinal Louis de Rohan might be interested in acquiring a dainty bit of jewelry for a High Personage. This hint, needless to say, came from the fair Jeanne de la Motte de Valois, who meantime, by forged notes, had aroused the poor dupe of a Cardinal to a high pitch of expectancy. She even went so far as to engineer a meeting between him and some replica of the Queen whom she had pulled out of a brothel in Paris. The darkness of the shrubbery of the Trianon gardens, the necessity for little but whispered conversations, the gifts of a book and a rose from the supposed Queen, combined to completely befuddle the silly Prelate.

After this Jeanne's work was easy. A contract was duly drawn up by Boehmer, January, 1785, calling for four payments of 400,000 francs each at six months intervals, the first to be made on August first of that year of grace, 1785. Jeanne pretended to take this contract to the Queen. Of course great secrecy was urged; the King was to know nothing of it. The contract came back with the words, "Bon, Marie Antoinette de France." "De France" was the slip in the forgery, for the Queen, had the simple Cardinal and the avid jewellers but known it, and as appeared at the trial, never signed her name that way. Eagerly swallowing the bait, the Cardinal signed the contract and Boehmer turned over the jewel—February 1, 1785. Jeanne was to superintend its delivery with great secrecy. She did deliver it, but to her husband. Both he and the necklace promptly vanished. Several months intervened before the first payment fell due and the worthy Count and Countess de la Motte meantime established themselves in some grandeur at Bar-sur-Aube. Then the bubble burst and into the Bastile went the Cardinal de Rohan, both La Mottes, their secretary who had done the forging of the letters, and the woman of the street who had impersonated the Queen. Cagliostro, who had come to Paris in order to be near his dupe, de Rohan, enjoyed too unsavory repute not to be implicated at least by inference, and was forced with his wife, Lorenza, to share with the rest the hospitality of the Bastile. This was really done on the accusation of the Valois who hoped by involving him to ease her own position. That he had even the smallest part in the conspiracy was never proven; and after eight or ten months alternately languishing behind the bars of the gloomy prison and facing his judicial inquisitors, he was acquitted of all complicity and set free. Whether guilty or innocent, and we may feel quite sure that guilty he might have been, had fair opportunity offered, the affair brought him much notoriety, for during the months of the trial he could not resist his hunger for the center of the stage and displayed his bombast and impudence to the full. Because the affair, justly or unjustly, marked the turning point in his career,

his involvement in the intrigue remains and must be noted in any account of him.

His acquittal was really a "not-guilty-but-don't-do-it-again" verdict, for next day a decree was issued by Louis XVI ordering him to leave Paris within 48 hours, and France within a week. He left and turned for the third time toward England. But the spoor of his last visit to London still smoked and his name was a stench in the nostrils of all honest Anglo-Saxon quackdom, nor was the public in general ready to view his presence with complaisance. The Diamond Necklace matter had been too well reported and the reputation of all connected with it had been badly smirched. Ridicule and persecution were the lot of the Cagliostros from the moment they set foot on English soil, and after trying in vain to stem the tide of hostility they left for the last time, their prestige gone, their glory departed.

One incident alone of this visit is worth relating, an incident which lends something of poetic humor to this last sordid chapter of Cagliostro's decline and fall. A certain editor, Morande by name, was one of the rogue's chief detractors and published repeated attacks on him. Cagliostro had on some occasion said that when he was in Arabia, he had learned that the natives having fed pigs on arsenic, turned them loose to be preyed on by the wild beasts of the vicinity. These promptly died of arsenic poisoning and thus the villagers were rid of the pest. Morande seized upon this story and held it and its author up to public scorn. With a flash of his old spirit and wit Cagliostro replied in another paper challenging Morande to partake of dinner with him on a date two months following, the conditions to be these: Morande might furnish and cook the dinner. One course was to be a young pig which Cagliostro should have in his keeping from the date of acceptance of the challenge to two hours before the meal when Morande might have it to prepare for the table. He offered a wager of 5,000 guineas that next morning Morande would be dead and himself, Cagliostro, alive. Morande declined

and suffered ridicule in consequence, but it was the swan song of the great charlatan.

On the continent the Count and Seraphina fared little better. There were a few friends here and there but even they feared the ridicule which was destroying the wonder-workers. Egyptian masonry had received a black eye. The Cagliostros were buffeted hither and yon and after weary months of futile effort to get under cover long enough to rally the Count's powers, they crept into Rome, where they hoped, it is supposed, to lose their identity in the byways of the great city. It was a literal placing of his head in the lion's jaws. He could not give up the effort to renew his masonic activities, but he was in Rome, the citadel of Catholicism, not in godless France. Before they had been in Rome six months the Inquisitors arrested both Cagliostros and with them took considerable documentary evidence—1789. The trial was of the usual Inquisitorial order. Lorenza is said to have broken down and confessed under "persuasion". Why Cagliostro escaped the death penalty is uncertain. He was sentenced to life imprisonment and sent to the fortress of San Leo where he died, perhaps in 1795. Lorenza ended her days in a convent.

No apology is offered for presenting a picture of the life and times of this arch mountebank and swindler, nor does it matter greatly that comparatively little of fact about him, but a great deal of fancy and fiction, has come down to us. We are concerned historically with the meaning of events rather than with the events themselves, and much meaning may be contained in the tradition that grows up around any character or event in history. Therefore, while separating wheat from chaff as carefully as may be, the meaning of each is to be considered.

An estimate of the man himself is difficult owing to the paucity of authenticated facts. Now the large bulk of such testimony is derived from the police blotters of the Europe of his day. These attest the widespread area over which his talents found expression, and in general exhibit the nefarious character of the activities in which those

talents revealed themselves. That the dour and peevish Scot, Carlisle, should discover here a golden opportunity for venting his neurotic spleen in a biographic sketch of the type he gives in his *Miscellanies,* is no wonder; nor that an emotional writer like Trowbridge, with his evident leanings toward occultism and mysticism, should seek to apotheosize his hero.

Carlisle writes the man down an unmitigated scoundrel and blackleg, unlettered, bombastic, and gross; Lorenza, his willing tool and able second. Trowbridge goes to the other extreme; admits he was a schemer but credits him with high motive. Somewhere between these two extreme estimates probably lies the true case. One thing seems clear and to the credit of the Count and Countess. However he used her, to whatever liaisons she leant herself in the course of their devious history, they stuck together through thick and thin; and it was only through the third degree methods of the Inquisition that her devotion to him finally gave way. No one can greatly blame her for that and it is even possible that her confession was the factor that saved him from the death penalty which traffic with masonry entailed in the Inquisition courts.

As to his practice of the Healing Art a few things are evident. He had no degree, no medical education as it was known in those days; but during his apprenticeship to the apothecary of the Benfratelli he did have ample opportunity to acquire a knowledge of drugs and their use, and probably of minor surgery; and with this as a grounding he was in position to acquire far more real knowledge as the years went by. He was certainly not lacking in intelligence and these opportunities could scarcely have been neglected, so that it is a safe assumption that his therapeutics were those in general use by the practitioners of the day. Moreover, to this legitimate, let us say, therapeutic resource he added later on the subtle and shady practices of hypnotism and occultism, caring not *how* he worked his cures, only that he worked them. As he went on, the conscious and successful effort to deceive must have

turned into a profound conviction of his own powers and thus his abilities in psychotherapeusis became greatly enhanced. Another fact of interest is that he took no money for his cures. He established clinics wherever he went, sought out the poor and treated them free,—even gave them food and money. To Trowbridge this evinces a true eleemosynary disposition and a love of his fellow men, but it may have sprung from design and good advertising sense. He was not after small game in those days. He sought a following in order to aggrandize his Egyptian Masonry which apparently paid him enormous dividends. What better method of securing the following he wanted for this semi-religious, semi-political order, than in imitating Jesus of Nazareth?

The age was one in which the old foundations were crumbling. Paracelsus had already made a bitter and devastating attack on the medical practice of the day and aside from the fact that Cagliostro did not belong in the regular ranks, his practice was probably no worse than that of the regulars and more successful in fact from his very deep conviction of his own psychic powers. Voltaire and Rousseau had undermined the spiritual and religious thought of the day. France, overlong under dominance of feudalism, was beginning to be shaken by the rumblings of the coming revolution and no one felt any security in former beliefs, religious, political, or philosophic. Loose thinking, loose living, unmorality and chicanery were rife and Cagliostro, the charlatan, was merely a sign of the times. That he moved in such high company in his later years was due to the fact that he had talents and organizing ability which were useful to one of the great revolutionary societies of the day. That, while serving them, he exploited the freemasons for his own ends was only to be expected from the character of the man and they probably were well enough aware of the risks run in employing him. He never betrayed them. Whether in the end they betrayed him is a question. They certainly did little to keep him out of the hands of the Inquisition. When all is told there is little

record of real harm done by him and no small record of good, whatever the motivation for its doing. Apart from the free clinics, he assuredly added a touch of humor, grim perhaps, but humor none the less, to an age otherwise drab and sordid.

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